



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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NOAA Announces a New Bag Limit for Vermilion Snapper, the Annual Catch Limit for Yellowtail Snapper, and the Elimination of the Reef Fish Venting Tool Requirement **Small Entity Compliance Guide**

NOAA Fisheries announces a final rule that establishes a bag limit for vermilion snapper within the reef fish aggregate bag limit, sets the annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper, and eliminates the reef fish venting tool requirement. The final rule will be effective September 3, 2013.

Vermilion snapper

The rule sets a 10-vermilion snapper bag limit within the 20-fish aggregate reef fish bag limit (see box below). Vermilion snapper is not overfished (the population is healthy) or undergoing overfishing (catch rates are not too high). However, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) received input from some fishermen that the vermilion snapper population may be declining. In addition, recreational landings have been increasing in recent years and could contribute to the vermilion snapper annual catch limit being met before the end of the fishing year. This would result in a closure of vermilion snapper fishing. To minimize the risk of this occurring, the Council recommended a 10-fish vermilion snapper bag limit within the 20-fish aggregate reef fish bag limit.

Yellowtail snapper

The rule increases the Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper annual catch limit from 725,000 pounds to 901,125 pounds. A recent assessment determined the yellowtail snapper population is considered to be healthy. Therefore, the Council recommended the annual catch limit be increased.

Reef fish venting tool requirement

The rule eliminates the requirement to use venting tools when fishing for reef fish. Some scientific studies have questioned the usefulness of venting tools in preventing barotrauma in fish, particularly those caught in deep waters. Barotrauma is damage caused by a quick change in pressure when fish are brought to the surface. In addition, some fish caught in shallow waters may not need to be vented, and attempts at venting may cause damage to fish by improper venting and increased handling times. Finally, the current requirement interferes with using other devices such as fish descenders. These devices can be used by fishermen to return fish back to depth. Because of these factors, the Council recommended the venting tool requirement be rescinded.

Other information

This bulletin serves as a Small Entity Compliance Guide, complying with section 212 of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996. This bulletin provides only a summary of the information about the rule. Discrepancies between this bulletin and the rule as published in the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.

Species in the Reef Fish 20-Fish Aggregate Bag Limit

- Vermilion Snapper
- Lane Snapper
- Almaco Jack
- Gray Triggerfish
- Tilefish
- Goldface Tilefish
- Blueline Tilefish

Copies of the final rule are available by contacting NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Regional Office at 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701 or by downloading it off the Southeast Regional Office's Web site for reef fish at

http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/reef_fish/2013/yt_vs_framework/index.html once it has published.

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